

Future Play Investment in Nelson

Subject: Pride in Place Playground Funding

Purpose

This briefing seeks support for prioritising future play investment in Nelson. Assessing against neighbourhood need, walk-to accessibility, lack of recent capital investment and the need to rebalance funding towards smaller community play areas.

Recommendation

It is recommended that **Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park** are endorsed as the priority neighbourhood play sites for the next phase of capital planning.

This recommendation should be progressed subject to confirmation of the following:

- asset ownership and maintenance responsibility;
- play inspection and condition data;
- outline capital costs and future maintenance implications;
- accessibility and inclusion requirements;
- ward member consultation; and
- engagement with local residents.

Background

Recent investment has significantly improved Nelson's main destination parks, particularly **Marsden Park, Victoria Park and Walverden Park**.

This investment has been positive and has strengthened high-profile play provision across the town. However, it also means that the next phase of capital investment should now give greater attention to smaller neighbourhood and estate playgrounds that have not benefited from the same level of improvement.

The strongest remaining case is therefore for targeted improvement to local play areas serving communities that rely most heavily on walkable open space.

Strategic Issue

Nelson has a mix of destination parks and smaller neighbourhood play areas. Destination parks are important, but they do not remove the need for good-quality local playgrounds close to where families live.

For many children and families, particularly those without easy access to private gardens, cars or paid leisure activities, the nearest local playground is the most realistic place for outdoor play.

Investment decisions should therefore be based not only on the age or condition of individual equipment, but on a wider neighbourhood need assessment.

That assessment should include:

- social need and deprivation;
- child and family population within walking distance;
- access to alternative play provision;
- current site condition;
- recent capital investment;
- accessibility and inclusion; and
- geographical spread across Nelson.

Recommended Priority Sites

The recommended Priority 1 sites are:

1. **Clough Head**
2. **Poplar Street**
3. **Lomeshaye Park**

Together, these sites offer the strongest opportunity to improve fair access to local play in communities where neighbourhood provision is particularly important.

Rationale for Prioritisation

1. Clough Head

Clough Head should be prioritised because it serves an estate community where local, walkable play provision is especially important.

The area is likely to include families with fewer alternatives to local open space, including limited access to private gardens, cars or paid leisure options. A well-maintained and attractive playground at Clough Head would therefore provide a direct benefit to children and families who rely on nearby facilities.

Clough Head also appears to have received less recent capital attention than the main destination parks. Investment here would help close the gap between high-profile park improvements and smaller neighbourhood facilities.

Strategic case: Clough Head offers a strong opportunity to target investment towards a community where local access matters most.

2. Poplar Street

Poplar Street should be prioritised because it sits within a dense residential catchment and is likely to support regular everyday use.

Unlike destination parks, Poplar Street is close to homes and can serve children and families as part of daily life. This makes it valuable for short visits, after-school use and families who may not travel across town to larger parks.

The site also represents the type of older neighbourhood play provision that can be overlooked when funding is concentrated on larger, more visible parks.

Strategic case: Poplar Street provides a strong opportunity to improve local play where it is most convenient and accessible for nearby residents.

3. Lomeshaye Park

Lomeshaye Park should be prioritised because it serves a large surrounding housing area and helps address a gap in neighbourhood-level investment.

The park provides local open space for families who may rely on walking-distance facilities rather than travelling to larger destination parks. Improving play provision at Lomeshaye would support access, wellbeing and local community use.

Lomeshaye is also strategically important because it serves an area that can be missed in borough-wide investment discussions if funding decisions focus mainly on flagship parks.

Strategic case: Lomeshaye Park offers a strong opportunity to improve play provision across a wider residential catchment and support fairer geographical coverage.

Comparison with Other Sites

The case for Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park is strongest because they combine:

- high neighbourhood need;
- strong walk-to catchments;
- limited recent capital investment;
- weaker access to alternative high-quality play provision; and
- a clear role in improving the spread of play investment across Nelson.

Other sites remain important, but they do not currently present the same combined case as the three priority options identified.

Marsden Park, Victoria Park and Walverden Park

These sites have already benefited from significant recent investment. They remain important destination parks but should not be the first call on the next phase of neighbourhood play funding.

Further investment in these parks at this stage would risk concentrating funding in areas that have already received substantial improvement.

Whitefield and Carr Road / Victoria Fringe

These areas benefit from proximity to major destination parks, particularly Marsden Park and Victoria Park.

While local access should continue to be monitored, these areas are partly offset by nearby improved facilities and therefore sit lower in priority than Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park.

Hey Street, Chatburn Park and Bradley Area

These remain important neighbourhood facilities and may require maintenance or future improvement.

However, when assessed against deprivation, walk-to need, recent capital investment and strategic coverage, they appear to present a less compelling combined case than the four recommended Priority 1 options.

Nearby play provision not prioritised at this stage

The wider area includes a number of other play provisions that should remain within the Council's monitoring and maintenance programme, but which do not currently present the same priority case for capital investment as Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park.

- **Marsden Park:** recent major investment and upgrades
- **Victoria Park:** significant recent improvement and is in good condition.
- **Walverden Park:** major recent investment
- **Whitefield / Carr Road and the Victoria Park fringe:** other nearby provision
- **Hey Street:** Equipment in reasonable condition comparatively
- **Chatburn Park:** reasonable condition compared to the sites
- **Cats Park:** Recent investment and improvements
- **Bradley Area:** alternative nearby provision

Assessment Framework

Future investment decisions should be supported by a consistent scoring framework. This will help demonstrate that priorities are evidence-led, transparent and fair.

Suggested criteria are:

1. Deprivation and social need

Sites serving communities with higher deprivation, child poverty or health inequality indicators should score higher.

2. Child population within walking distance

Sites with a larger number of children and family households within a reasonable walking catchment should score higher.

3. Access to alternative play provision

Sites further away from good-quality alternative playgrounds should score higher.

4. Current condition

Sites with older, poorer-quality or less inclusive equipment should score higher for investment need.

5. Accessibility and inclusion

Sites with limited accessible or inclusive play opportunities should be prioritised for improvement.

6. Recent capital investment

Sites that have not benefited from recent major capital works should score higher.

7. Strategic spread

Investment should improve coverage across Nelson rather than concentrate improvements in a small number of already improved parks.

Political and Corporate Case

Prioritising Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park would support a clear and defensible political message.

The next phase of play investment should focus on communities that have not yet benefited from recent major park improvements. This would demonstrate that the Council is committed to fair access, prevention, wellbeing and support for children and families.

This approach aligns with wider priorities around:

- health inequalities;
- child poverty;
- prevention and wellbeing;
- active travel;
- inclusive communities;
- neighbourhood renewal;
- and fair access to local services.

The proposal is not simply about upgrading individual playgrounds. It is about rebalancing investment so that smaller estate and neighbourhood facilities are improved alongside the town's destination parks.

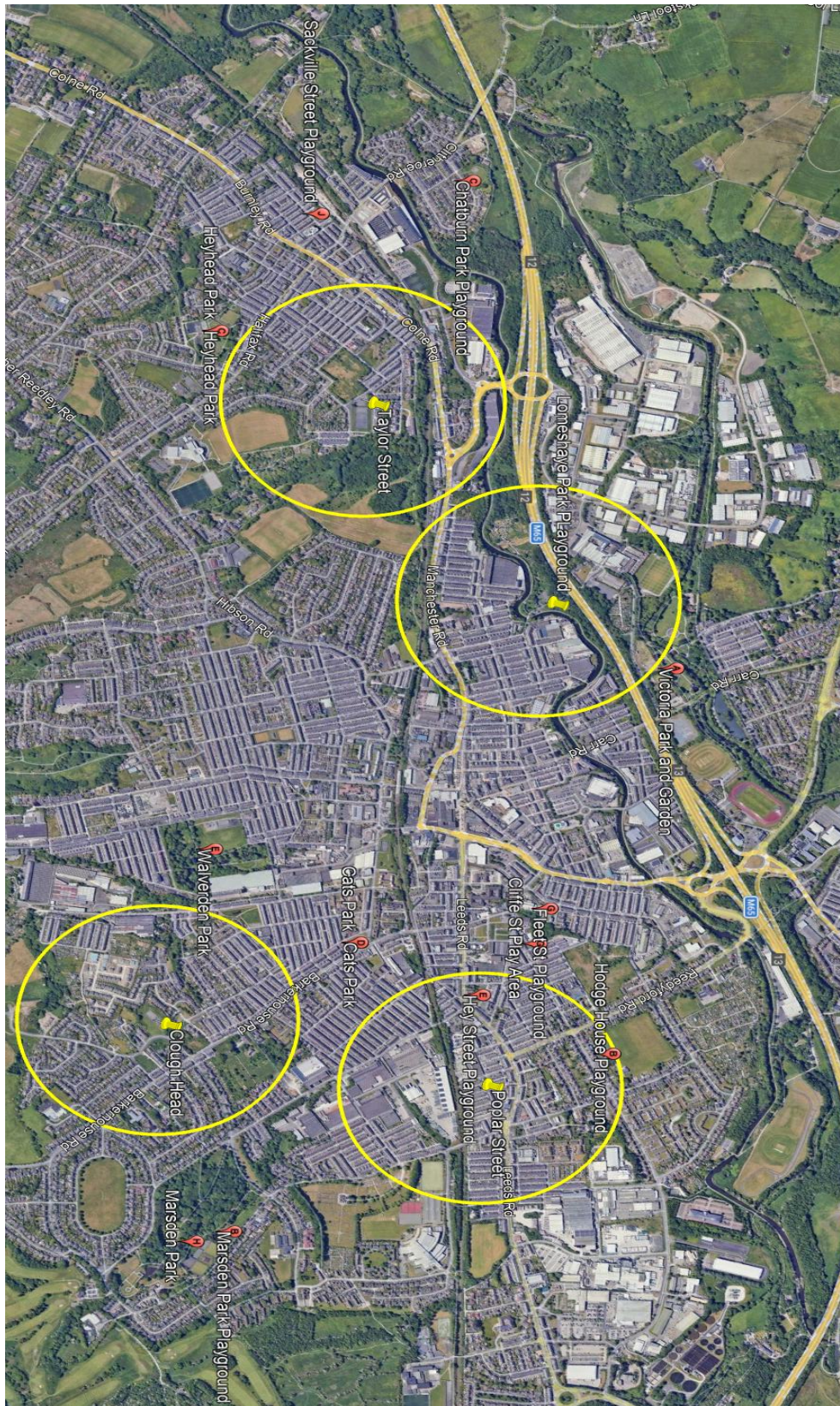
Conclusion

Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park should be treated as the strongest candidates for the next phase of play investment in Nelson.

They offer the clearest combined case in terms of neighbourhood need, everyday accessibility, investment imbalance, strategic spread and practical deliverability.

Prioritising these sites would help move the programme from improving flagship parks towards tackling inequalities in smaller neighbourhood facilities, ensuring that children and families across Nelson and nearby communities have fairer access to good-quality local play.

Maps and Images



A map showing Clough Head, Poplar Street and Lomeshaye Park in relation to Nelson's wider play network. Circles indicate a 20-minute walking catchment.



Clough Head with entrances highlighted



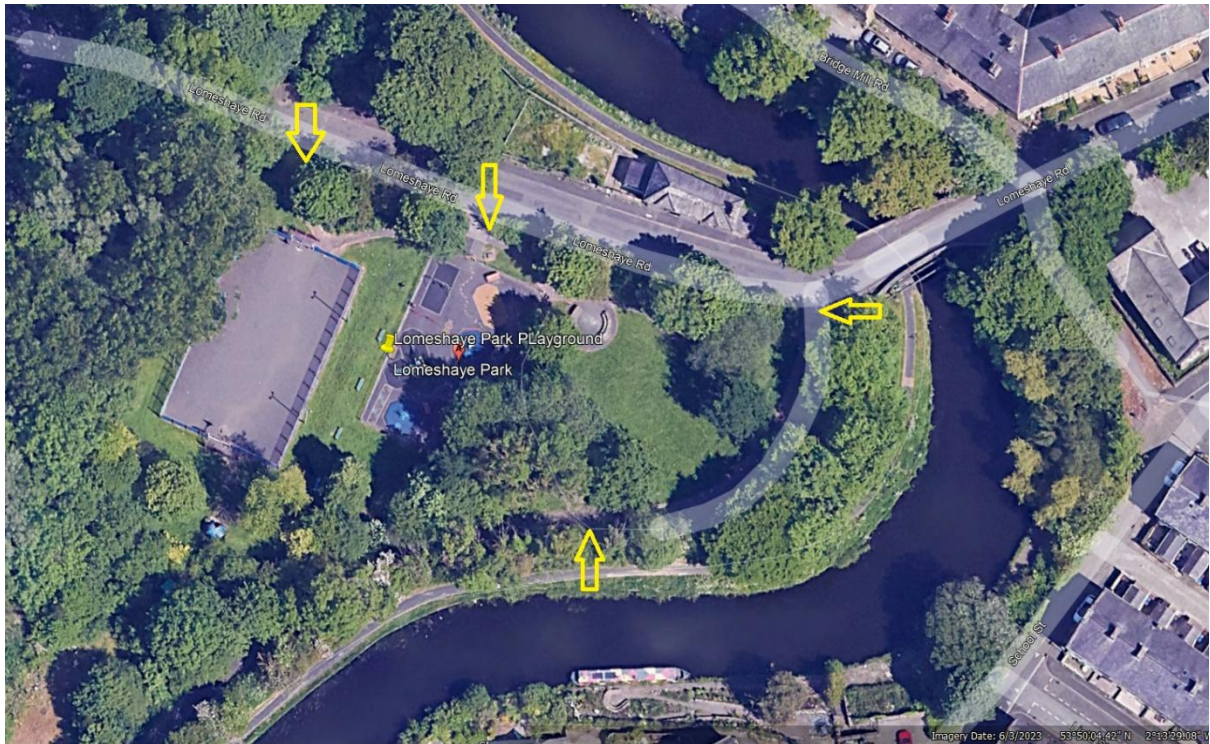
Site view of Clough Head Park



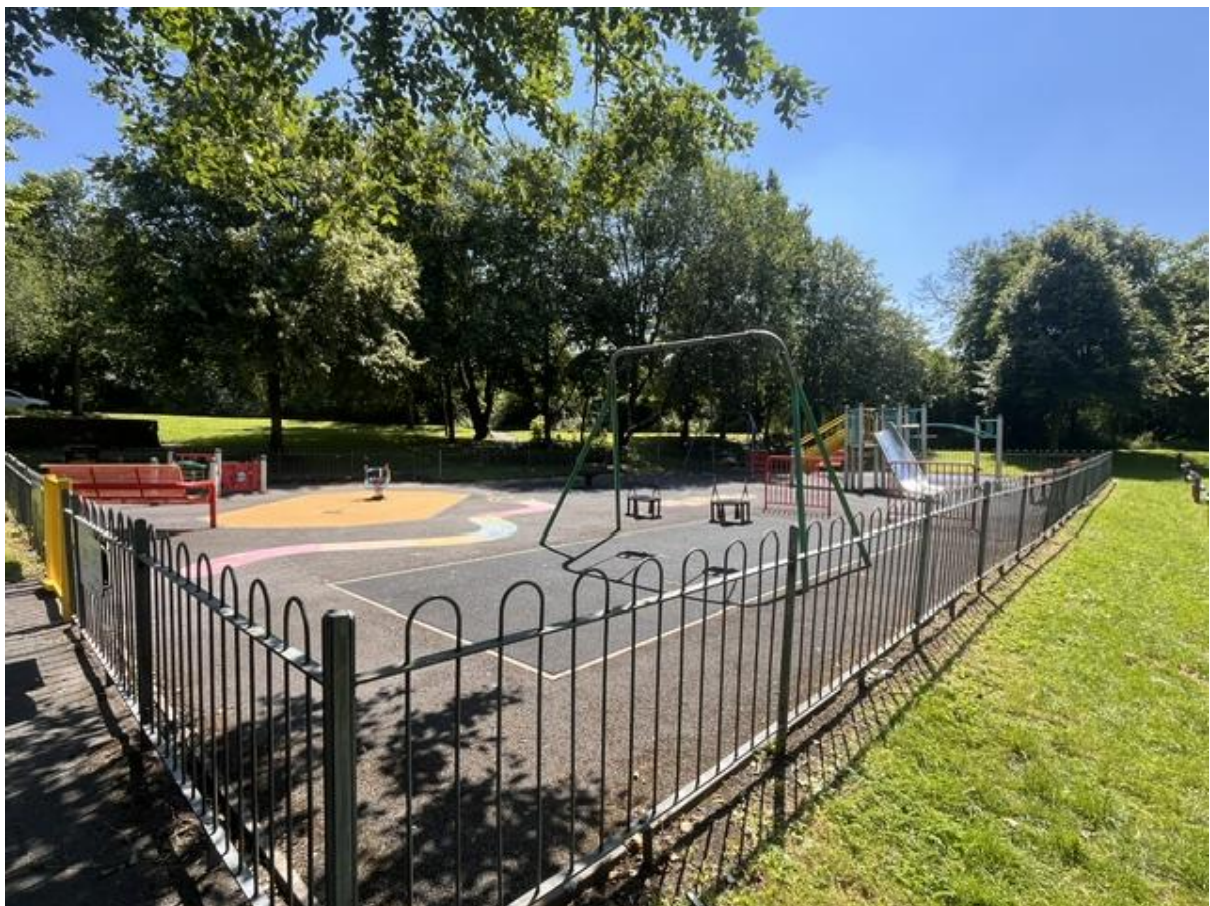
Images showing poor quality of surfacing and equipment at Clough Head Park



Current layout of Poplar Street



Map of Lomeshaye Park with entrances highlighted



Limited play provision at Lomeshaye Park



Wider Lomeshaye site showing room for expansion